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RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHMA #0365 1471449
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 271449Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1034
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS MONROVIA 000365

SIPDIS

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [LI](#)

SUBJECT: LIBERIA: Census confirms population estimates; ignores war

1. The final Census, released May 21, confirms a population of 3,476,608 Liberians. It notes a growth rate of 2.1% since the last census in 1984, and projects a doubling time of 33 years. There is no mention of the deaths (estimated at 250,000) or the massive emigration during the years of conflict or of the impact that might have on population growth rates or gender balance. The Census had become a political football as legislators refused to debate the redistricting legislation ("Threshold Bill") that is a prerequisite for the 2011 elections until the final census results were available.

2. The numbers speak for themselves: Liberians are young, uneducated and concentrated in the capital. The GOL is confronting a baby boom, with the number of Liberians under age 10 exceeding the number over age 30. Only 25% of women have any education over primary level, and most have no education at all. USAID was one of the primary supporters of the Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS), which conducted the Census in March 2008.

3. Post has gleaned the following from the Census:

-- The Monrovia area, Montserrado County, is home to 1,118,241 people, almost a third of the population. About a third of those residents are displaced. (Note: Monrovia's water and sewer system, for example, was designed for approximately 400,000 people.)

-- Over 71% of the population is 29 or younger and therefore has no life experience prior to the war.

-- Liberians between the ages of 30 and 65 make up 25% of the total population, placing pressure on roughly a quarter of the population to support all the others.

-- Overall, Liberia has roughly the same number of men as women. There are fewer men than women in Bong, Lofa, Montserrado and Nimba counties, sites of some of the worst fighting.

-- There are equal numbers of boys and girls until age 10.

-- More boys from 10-19.

-- More women from 20-39.

-- More men from 40-59.

-- More women above 60.

-- Most heads of household are literate until the over-55 cohort, after which most are illiterate.

-- 52% of Liberian women have no education; they are mother to 70% of children.

-- The 24% of mothers with some education beyond primary level have only 18% of children. That is, 82% of Liberian children have mothers with little or no education.

-- Of girls under age 14, there are 74 widows. About 4,000 are married and over 200 are divorced or separated.

-- There are 3 million Christians and 425,000 Muslims (about 12%).

-- The largest ethnic group is Kpelle (706,000 or 20.35%; primarily from Bong and Gbarpolu counties).
-- Next are the Bassa (470,000 or 13.5%).
-- There are 115,000 Mandingo (3.3%).

-- There are 431 U.S.-born residents in Liberia, of whom two are women over 80.

-- The largest foreign populations are from Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire.

THOMAS-GREENFIELD